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ABSTRACT

A study examined 20 beginning college interpersonal or relational communication textbooks to determine the degree to which they dealt with any or all of 10 specific communication competencies. The 10 competencies, targeted from numerous other evaluation systems and scales, are as follows: (1) describing feelings, (2) initiating and maintaining conversation, (3) giving and receiving compliments, (4) clarifying perceptions, (5) requesting behavior change, (6) responding to criticism, (7) paraphrasing, (8) pinpointing and documenting, (9) stating intentions and purpose, and (10) saying "no." It was found that none of the 20 books, including one by the researcher who extrapolated the 10 competencies, taught all the competencies entirely. Some of them seemed to be more thorough than others, but with variations in format or approach to teaching. No one competency was taught in every book. Some books chose to deal with the various relationships in life while others did not. Possibly the nonaccessibility of competencies makes them difficult to assess, and those texts that give the most attention to the competencies may not be chosen for that reason, but rather on the basis of other features, such as philosophy or format or style. The results suggest that perhaps textbooks should be written with competency testing as a goal, or perhaps competency testing of communication skills should be eliminated. (A chart rating each textbook for each competency, as well as a bibliography of the 20 texts are included.) (HTH)

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THEORY INTO PRACTICE: Is Theory of Communication Competence Reflected in Current Textbooks

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The issue of communication competence is of current importance to teachers of speech communication. Communication competence can be defined as the ability to use language to communicate within a specific situation (Rubin, 1983). Once these skills have been defined, attention has been given to the assessment of these skills. However, in order to assess a skill, learning must occur initially. Thus, the question: how or where are students to learn these skills? Answer: In the classroom? At home? By experience?

As techers of communication skills, we cannot assume that students will just "naturally" be competent communicators based on previous and widely-diversified experiences. According to McCroskey, "knowing about" and the "ability to" are not necessarily connected. (McCroskey, 1982)

In an attempt to adequately prepare students for the types of communication situations they may encounter, we seek textbooks to assist us in order to meet those needs. Unfortunatley, with the recent plethora of interpersonal and basic communication textbooks, it is difficult to discern the appropriate choice.

This project will survey twenty recent interpersonal or relationship communication textbooks suitable for a beginning-level college course. More succinct, <u>accessibility</u> rather than <u>assessibility</u> of competencies will be sought in this project.

Just as there are numerous texts from which to choose, there are numerous scales, charts, criteria, systems, inventories, rationales, realizations, and guidelines for defining competence in interpersonal. Which one or ones truly represent interpersonal competence?

Bochner and Kelly (1974) have developed a conceptual framework to which they have applied an instructional strategy for the improvement of interpersonal

competence. Similar to Bochner and Kelly's framework is a system developed by Chris Argyris which enables the observer to score the interpersonally competent behavior of individuals in groups. (Argyris, 1965)

Weiman (1976) described five dimensions of communication competence: affiliation-support, social, relaxation, empathy, behavioral flexibility, and interaction-management skills.

The "Speaking and Listening Competencies for High School Graduates" as defined in the SCA guidelines labels four major categories with subcategories totalling nineteen. There are also scales for children's communication competence: Modes of Speech Continuum and The Social Competence Scale; as well as scales for adults: The Interpersonal Competence Scoring System and the Palo Alto Group Therapy Scale. In addition there are: The Social Adjustment Behavior Rating Scale, Cakhuff's Rating Scale, Communication Rating Scale, the Purdue Basic Oral Communication Evaluation Form, The Interpersonal Checklist, and the list goes on and on. Summaries of these and other systems are described by Backlund. (Backlund, et. al., 1978).

From these numerous sytems and scales one emerged as the most appropriate from this project Susan Glaser (1983) has targeted ten interpersonal competencies. They are recent, succinct, and appropriate for surveying beginning level college textbooks. They are as follows:

1. Describing feelings
2. Initiating and maintaining conversation
3. Giving and receiving compliments
4. Clarifying perceptions
5. Requesting behavioral change
6. Responding to criticism
7. Paraphrasing
8. Pinpointing and documenting
9. Stating intentions and purpose
10. Saying "no"

Twenty interpersonal textbooks were examined for their coverage of these competencies. Each book was surveyed, not reviewed for the target competencies.

None of these books, including Glaser's, teach to all the competencies entirely. Some of them seem to be the more thorough than others, but with variation in format or approach to teaching. No one competency is taught in every book. Can there be disagreement to this extent as to how interpersonal communication is actually taught? Of course!

Interpersonal communication includes a continuum of relationships, all demanding various skills, but all necessary to life. Some books choose to deal with these various relationships while others do not: (ie. family, intimate, love). Skills such as conflict resolution or listening may or may not be subjects for interpersonal textbooks and the list goes on of discrepancies.

Perhaps the non:accessibility of competencies is making them difficult to assess. Those which give the most attention to the competencies, would not be chosen for that reason, but rather more likely there are other considerations: philosophy of the course, format or style of teaching material, and so forth. This only emphasizes the fact that textbook choice is not made solely on content. Some books rely on supplementary material, while others lend themselves to particular curriculum better than others. Theory versus application is a current issue in the teaching of interpersonal communication which can dictate the textbook choice.

The initial outcome of this study appears discouraging and somewhat frustrating. You might ask, "How can I teach these competencies, as in competency testing, if I do not have the definitive textbook to guide me?"

Conclusions can be drawn. First, perhaps textbooks need to be written with competency testing as a goal;

Second, we could throw out competency testing as a discipline and say it's impossible, as the definitive competent communicator does not exist, or:

Finally, and most realistically, we can accept the fact that interpersonal communication, something we measure by applied skills, is theory-based, which supports various approaches to the teaching of those skills and the writing of textbooks. None of us could agree on a standard for interpersonal communication given cross-sections of students and their needs. Cloning competent communicators, in our own image, is not the goal of competency testing, nor should it be the goal of interpersonal textbooks.

		Target Interpersonal Competencies											
		Describing Feelings	Initiating and Maintaining Conversations	Giving and Receiving Compliments	Clarifying Perceptions	Requesting Behavior Change	Responding to Criticism	Paraphrasing	Pinpointing and Documenting	Stating Intentions and Purpose	Saying "No"	format* / total pages	
Interpersonal Textbooks	Adler Rosenfield	211-215	261-262		172-180	248	263-271	157	85-96	85		T	308
	Adler Towne	265-269, 285-288			94	152-154		232-233, 262	134-166	27-29		A	272
	Brooks	172-177	235	158-159	77-85	183	147		89	187	147	A	324
	Byrum	180-186	288-301	248-251	51-85	328-333					194-199	A	393
	Carr	237-277	98	153-161	25-43	309-321		147-153	125-130	22, 332-333		T	413
	DeVito	94-107		112-125	264-283		353-361	285-307	127-154		110-125	A	470
	Gamble	197-224	137-138	114-125	65-101			132-135	235-252		332-340	A	389
	Giffin		208		92-123	254-255		226-227	177-178			T	263
	Glaser	75	103		59	4-16	131	149	198	200		A	230
	Knapp		149-176		130-131			339-341	222-226			T	366
	Patton	346	323, 451	204	125-127	62-64, 482-85	66	44-45, 186-7	219-220	4		R	499
	Pearson	121-177	192-208					147	58-59		128-134	A	292
	Sathré	14-15			195			75	77-89			A	210
	Stewart	129-135			163-211		238-240	216-248	55-76	46		T	298
	Stewart D'Angelo	164-168			192-197			192-193	38-44			R	347
	Tubbs			58-60	89-91							T	328
	Vandemark	42	69-91		4-7, 12-13		84		63		334	A	109
	Verderber	120-125			107-109		155-158	146-149	81-84	178	181-185	A	307
	Weaver	90-105	152-159		62-69			125-132	134-159		264-279	A	360

* Format

A = Activity
R = Readings
T = Theory

NOTES

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